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Facility versus Difficulty

One day the Prophet of Islam seated himself in a mosque in Medina, along with some companions. Shortly thereafter, a Bedouin entered the mosque and began urinating. The Prophet's Companions rose with the intention of beating the Bedouin. But the Prophet forbade them to do so, asking them to let him be. When the man had finished urinating, the Prophet asked the Companions to fetch a bucket of water and wash the place clean.

Afterwards he explained to his Companions: You are sent to make things easy and not to make things difficult (*Fathul Bari*, 1/386).

This illustrates for us an unwavering principle of Islam, that is, in social life when any unpleasant incident takes place, the believers should concentrate on finding a solution to the problem and not just think in terms of what punishment to mete out to the problem-maker. On all such occasions the urge to reform should be engendered within the believers instead of a desire to exact revenge. Such methods should be adopted as alleviate rather than aggravate the problem. Just as when some building is set on fire, the most natural impulse is to immediately extinguish it, rather than fan the flames to make it flare up even more.

In most controversial matters there can be both easy and difficult ways of resolving the problem. Treading the path of facility usually eases matters, whereas treading the path of difficulty can cause matters to flare up with even greater intensity. In all situations, Islam gives preference to the former, rather than to the latter approach.

This is an eternal principle of Islam, relating to both personal and social life. It ought to be applied in all matters inside as well as outside the home. It is a perfect principle on which to base a perfect system of life.

Firm Utterance

The Qur'an enjoins believers to "fear God and speak the truth. He will bless your works and forgive you your sins. He who obeys God and His apostle shall win a greater victory" (33: 70-71).

This Quranic verse commands mankind to say what is fair. *Qaul-e-Sadid* means saying what is true and exactly in accordance with the facts. Just as the arrow reaches its target by being shot in precisely the right direction, similarly *qaul-e-sadid* hit the mark by making one's words correspond in every detail with reality.

According to a hadith the Prophet once prayed: 'O, my God, grant guidance to my heart and grant my language (word) *qaule-sadid*. This prayer shows how great is the importance given to *qaul-e-sadid* in Islam. The truth is that *qaul-e-sadid* is the mark of a person being a true believer.

There are two kinds of human utterance: realistic and unrealistic. Realistic or *sadid* utterances are those which tally exactly with reality; which are based on facts and events, and on firm arguments; which take stock of all matters under discussion; which do not make concessions to anything unfair; which are completely free from prejudice.

Conversely, unrealistic utterances are those which do not take the actual state of affairs into account, which are based on suppositions and conjecture, on mere opinion, rather than on fact. Only the former type of utterances are approved of by God.

It is the demand of humanity that whenever a believer speaks, he should say what is right and fair. *Qaul-e-sadid* is a proof of man's humanity and, utterances not in accordance with *qaul-e-sadid*, are a proof of his having strayed outside the fold of humanity, although he may still appear to be a human being.

The Culture of Mercy (Rahmat)

Islamic culture is one of mercy (*rahmat*). The aspect of mercy in Islam is so prominent that it engulfs the entire lives of those who have fully adopted the principles of Islam.

Islam teaches its followers that, when they meet one another, they should address one another with such words as "May peace and God's blessings be upon you." Even when one sneezes, he should say, 'May God be praised', and the others sitting with him will respond 'May God bless you.' When the believer enters the mosque, he should say: 'May God open the gates of mercy to me.' Similarly, when worshippers have concluded their prayer, they are to turn their faces sideways and say: 'May God's blessings and peace be upon you.'

In this way, on all occasions and at every stage, the phrases of peace and mercy come readily to the lips of the believer. Thinking and speaking in terms of mercy become the distinguishing features of the believers. Their whole life is moulded by the demands of mercy and compassion.

The Prophet often uttered such phrases as 'May God bless the man, may God bless the woman.' This goes to show what type of attitude Islam wants to develop in its adherents. This is the culture of *Rahmat* and Love. Islam demands that on all occasions human beings should be well intentioned towards one another; on all occasions man should offer the gifts of love and compassion to others. Even in moments of conflict, such words come to the lips of the believers: "May God have mercy on you, why did you say or do such and such a thing."

God is the All-Merciful. He desires his servants to live in this world as merciful creatures.

The No-Problem Person

A believer is a no-problem person. In all situations and circumstances he stands out as Mr. No Problem. His sensitivity towards others is so heightened that he does not like creating any problems whatsoever. The companions of the Prophet were very sensitive in this way – so much so that if a horse-rider's whip fell to the ground, he would not ask a passerby to pick the whip for him. Instead, he would dismount and pick the whip himself (Abu Dawud, 2/124).

We learn from Islamic traditions that the best Muslim is one from whose evils people are safe. From one of these traditions we have the saying: A believer is one who fears God and keeps people safe from his evil (Al-Bukhari).

According to another tradition recorded in Al-Bukhari, the Prophet of Islam observed: “*Sadaqa* (voluntary alms) is incumbent upon every Muslim.” That is, every Muslim should be a giver. Asked what to do if one had nothing to give, he replied that one should earn and be a giver. When asked what the would-be giver should do if he were unable to earn, the Prophet replied: He should voice his good intentions towards others. Asked if he were unable to do even that, the Prophet replied that he should then refrain himself from causing harm to others, because this is also a gift. (*Fathul Bari*, 10/462).

According to another hadith the Prophet observed: “A believer with perfect faith is one who struggles to spend his life and property in the cause of God. And the second in rank is one ‘Who is engaged in prayer in some corner and from whom people are safe (Sunan Abi Dawud, 3/5).

We have a large number of such traditions in book of hadith. These demonstrate a range of characters which can be taken as models for posterity. Of this selection, the individual – who ranks highest in character is one who benefits others. The honest, but still acceptable standard of character in Islam is that of the individual who, being entirely harmless, creates no problems for the rest of society.

Purity and Cleanliness

Islam greatly approves cleanliness. According to the Qur'an: Allah loves those that turn to Him in repentance and purify themselves (2:222).

When man rues his mistakes and returns to the path of truth, this is called an act of repentance. As such, it purifies man's inner self. Just as by using water we can cleanse the dirt from the body, so by repentance we can purify the soul – the inner-self. That is why Islam lays great stress on both these things.

According to a hadith: "Purity is half of faith." Similarly the Prophet of Islam once observed: "God is clean and loves cleanliness." (Thn Majah)

Man is a creature who has been specially granted the quality of sensitivity. That is why man naturally likes cleanliness, and since Islam is a religion of nature, it lays great stress on cleanliness. Man's body, his clothing and his home, should all be pictures of cleanliness.

It was due to the importance given to cleanliness that the companions of the Prophet used to bathe daily. According to Muwatta Imam Malik, Abdullah ibn Umar spoke of how his father used to take a bath before each prayer. In this way he used to bath five times a day. The third Caliph, Usman ibn Affan, used to bath daily (Musnad Ahmad).

The cleanliness of body and soul is one of the basic demands of Islam.

The Positive Way

We have been advised in the Qur'an that goodness and evil are not equal. Therefore we should return good for evil (41: 34). This has been expressed repeatedly in the Qur'an in different wording.

This means that believers should always react positively. At all events they should refrain from negative reaction. Their behaviour should be proper, not only in normal circumstances, but also in abnormal circumstances. That is, even when any group displays bad behaviour, it is still incumbent on the believers not to display a retaliatory mentality. At that moment, too, they should prove to be men of principle. They should maintain their good behaviour, even in the face of bad behaviour from others.

Interpreting this verse, Abdullah ibn Abbas comments: 'God has commanded Muslims in this verse, even when they are angered, to resort to patience and tolerance. Whenever anyone shows any signs of ignorance or a biased mentality, believers should adopt the path of tolerance and fortitude. And whenever anyone displays bad behavior, believers should forgive him.

This Islamic course of action may be described as positive behaviour. That is, opting for moderation instead of retaliation. Whatever the attitude of others may be, believers should always remain true to the highest Islamic standards of human character.

A believer is one who begins to lead his life in accordance with the higher realities; the level of whose thinking is above that of ordinary human beings. Such a person comes to have a limitless capacity for tolerance. His inner-self is so deeply immersed that in peace, no outward event can disturb his emotional balance. He takes pity on those who are easily angered. Where ordinary people become provoked, he remains blissfully serene.

The Payment of Dues and the Recognition of Rights

According to al-Bukhari, God said: "I will become a claimant against three persons, one of these being a person who engaged a labourer, made him labour fully, but did not pay the wages" (*Mishkat al-Masabih*, 2/899).

Ibn Majah has narrated from Abdullah ibn Umar that the Prophet of Islam observed: "Pay the labourer his wages before his sweat dries up (that is, do not delay payment) (*Mishkhat Al-Masabih*, 2/900).

In this world, it repeatedly happens that one person employs another. In all such matters Islam enjoins the full payment of wages without any delay. After getting the work done, asking the labourer to come the next day for payment is extremely inconsiderate, and as such Islam forbids it.

Just as an employer needs the services of an employee, so also does the employee need compensation for his labour. This is a two-sided demand. When the worker has finished his work, it becomes incumbent on the employer to refrain from placing any obstacle in the way of payment of the sum he has promised.

In cases where wages or compensation have not been fixed in advance, Islam demands that for all services rendered, requital should be made in one form or another. If this cannot be done, for any reason, in material terms, the services should be fully acknowledged and publicly commended, and prayers said to God for the performer of the services.

Paying immediate recompense on completion of a task increases mutual trust in society. Any practice contrary to this will cause society as a whole to fall prey to misgivings about a lack of trustworthiness in their fellow men.

Predictable Character

Who is the best individual. To Islam the best individual is one who is predictable in character, about whom one can be sure in advance that, whenever one has any dealings with him, he will prove a true, dependable human being.

As recorded in traditions, once when the Prophet of Islam was standing along with some companions, he addressed them thus: "Should I not tell you of the good and bad people among you?" On hearing this, they remained silent. Then the Prophet repeated this question three times. One of them ultimately said, "Why not, O Prophet of God, you should tell us about the good and bad people among us." The Prophet said: "The good among you is one from whom only good is expected and from whose evil people are safe" (At-Tirmizi).

According to this hadith, the best person is one who, in his encounters with others, always has good things to say to them. He is beneficent to all, giving them gifts to bring them happiness. People may always expect justice from him, for, fundamentally, he is a man of principle and character.

This predictable character remains with him, even when he is hurt or oppressed by others. Even in such unfavourable circumstances, his truth-loving character never deserts him. He is able to answer provocative statements patiently and calmly. It may be taken for granted that even though he experiences bad behaviour from others, he will, in accordance with his principles, remain on the path of good behaviour. His character will always come up to the highest standard of human hopes and expectations.

Abdullah Ibn Masud asked the Prophet what action was best. "Praying at the proper time," he replied. "What comes next, Messenger of God?" "Not saying things which hurt others," the Prophet said.

Everything Created in Pairs

*Nothing is complete without its pair!
So this world must also have a pair.*

Many of the basic teachings of the Qur'an can be well understood in the light of modern knowledge. The Qur'an says, for example, that this world is not the final one; after it will come another world. At present, that world is invisible to us, but it is present nonetheless; it exists in real and absolute form. Early theologians resorted to speculation in support of this claim. But the proof that the Qur'an has given is one that can be better understood when put to the test of scientific investigation.

The Qur'an says:

And all things We made in pairs, so that you may give thought. (51 :49)

Everything is in accordance with this law of nature. Nothing is complete without its pair. So this world must also have a pair, for only then will it be complete. It is this pair of the present world that is called the hereafter.

It was known in ancient times that there were pairs in the human and animal worlds. Later on man learnt of pairs in trees and plants. In 1928, however, it was discovered that solid matter also had a pair. In that year the British physicist Paul Dirac demonstrated the possibility of other, invisible particles existing alongside those of matter. Then, in 1932, K. Anderson discovered, while studying cosmic rays, that with electrons there were other particles with an opposite electric charge. These particles were called anti-electrons. This research was pursued further and finally it was learnt that all particles in the universe existed in the form of pair-particles: particle and anti-particle, atom and anti-atom, matter and anti-matter; there was even, as Dirac showed in 1933, an anti-world.

Many present-day scientists are of the opinion that this anti-world is an entity apart from us, having a parallel existence of its own. This world is made up of matter; according to the law of opposites there should be another world made up of anti-matter. It is estimated that 20 million years ago, when the Big Bang explosion occurred, photon-matter and anti-matter came together in two separate forms. The two then started to form the world and the anti-world.

The first people to work on this theory were a Swedish pair, physicist Oskar Klein and astrophysicist Hannes Alven. The results of their research were published in 1963. The Soviet mathematician, Dr. Gustav Naan, further consolidated the theory. According to him, the anti-world cannot be fully explained by known theories and laws of physics, yet he is convinced that the anti-world exists, even now. It is, however, independent of us, existing on its own, parallel to this world. In the present world all anti-particles are in an unstable condition; but in the anti-world they will all be stable, for the nuclei of atoms have a negative electric charge, while electrons are positively charged.

Since this world is ephemeral, it follows that the anti-world, or to use its religious term, the hereafter, must be an eternal world. The discoveries of modern science, then, have given us a picture of the next world which accords with that of the Qur'an.

On Trust and Obligation

One of the marks of true believers is, according to the Qur'an, that they "faithfully observe their trusts and their covenants" (23:8).

Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani has briefly explained it in these words: "They do not commit breach of trust and do not break promises, neither in the matter of God nor in the matter of men" (p. 443).

Everything man has is given to him in trust by God or by man. In this way everyone is bound by certain promises and obligations. Some obligations are entered into by written or spoken agreement, while others are a matter of tacit understanding. Whatever the form of agreement, man has to fulfill all these trusts and obligations. If he fails to do so, he does not come up to the highest standards of humanity. He is proving himself guilty in the eyes of God.

Man's body, heart and mind, are all like trusts from God. It is, therefore, incumbent upon man to make the best use of these endowments within the limits decreed by God. That is, his hands and feet should move only for the cause of justice, and not for tyranny. His mind should be full only of well-wishing and not of ill-will. Similarly all the trusts by which he is bound should be discharged to the trustees, whether these trusts are in written or in verbal form. He should never regard another's possessions as his own.

Everyone is bound by obligations, in relation on the one hand to man and on the other to God. According to the Qur'an, trust of two kinds stems from God; one is the inherent sense of responsibility man is born with; this form of trust is binding upon all human beings born on this earth. Another form of trust is that which arises from faith in God. Only those are bound by this sense of commitment who have embraced God's religion as brought to them by God's messenger; in this sense, these believers are consciously bound in trust. Let's now take the matter of trust as regards man. Some obligations are incurred from time to time as they arise in particular and are set down in contracts, while others automatically devolve upon individuals either as family members, or as citizens of the state, living in society. Discharging all these trusts and obligations is man's duty, in obedience both to his own nature and to the Shariah.

Non-Violence and Islam-II

Izhar-e-deen was not an incident of short duration, but an ongoing assertion of the eternal dominance of Islam. Its implication was that in the world of ideology, such a revolution would be brought about as would establish the supremacy of Islam forever. Its purpose was to unravel all the veils of superstition which clouded human judgement, and to lay bare the scientific proofs hidden in nature, so that the truth of monotheism could be brought to light for all humanity. As the Qur'an puts it, 'They desire to extinguish the light of Allah with their mouths: but Allah seeks only to perfect His light, however much the infidels may abhor it.' (9:32, 33)

Granting ideological ascendancy to God's religion was a matter of considerable complexity, amounting to the writing of history afresh. For although God's unassailable truth had always existed, it had become obscured by false and misguided ideas, because thinking, the arts and learning in general, had all become fettered by superstition and idolatry. This had led to a veil being thrown over true religion, which was the only proper vehicle for God's truth. The coercive systems of the monarchies which prevailed all over the world at that time were responsible for perpetuating this state of affairs, for any intellectual freedom, particularly the freedom of religion, would have been a challenge to their supreme authority. Under such systems, there could be only such social development as suited individual rulers, and there could be no scientific development whatsoever.

Systems of governance which depended on religious persecution had, therefore, to be overthrown, so that a propitious atmosphere could be created for the performance of *dawah* of the true religion. This was carried into effect with resounding success by the Prophet and his companions, and all arguments were rallied in support of God's true religion, so that all other religions would be divested of their former influence. This abolition of oppressive systems and the freeing of people's minds from superstition naturally led to free scientific enquiry, a process which Islam has continued to foster over the centuries without interruption, and which has culminated in the unparalleled scientific achievements of the present day.

The technological advance which have been made possible by this scientific revolution have in turn provided Islam with an improved means of propagating Islam, namely modern communications. By making use of the media, those engaged in *dawah* work can spread the word of God much further and much faster than ever before. According to a hadith, a time was to come when God's word would enter all the homes in the world. (*Musnad*, Ahmad). This was indirectly a prediction of the advent of our modern age of communications.

In ancient times, the study of religion could be done only as something sacred and as a matter of dogma. That is why established and unestablished religions had not, academically been distinguished

from one another. In modern times, thanks to the influence of the scientific revolution, the study of religions can be done as objectively and as critically as any other matter which comes under scientific scrutiny. Such critical study has proved, purely academically, that historically there is only one reliable religion, and that is Islam. All other religions are lacking in this historical credibility. Prior to this, the *dayees* of Islam could resort only to traditional arguments in support of their faith, but it has become possible to measure up Islamic realities by the highest standards of human knowledge and to establish its authenticity by purely logical arguments. Indeed, in latter times, "the sciences themselves have borne out the divine truths of Islam.

Yet, despite modern developments, our own times are constantly regarded as being fraught with problems for Islam. Muslims, lacking in understanding and awareness, forget that the modern age has never ceased to be the age of Islam. They fail to appreciate that Islam's potential remains undiminished, and that it is for believers to convert that potential into an immediate reality. They should take into account the fact that, in the wake of the scientific revolution, which is itself the direct outcome of the Islamic revolution, it has become possible to begin a serious and beneficial dialogue between Islam and non-Islam, the result of which will necessarily be in favour of Islam. Now, this being so, the need of the hour is for Muslims to put an end unilaterally to all violent activities against *madu* (addressee) nations, so that a normal, amicable relationship may be allowed to grow, between *dayee* and *madu*.

A Great Opportunity

1. Since direct argument cannot be applied to religious beliefs pertaining to the unseen world, these can be supported only by indirect or inferential argument. Educated people had therefore come to believe that religious realities belonged only to the domain of dogma, and that they were not academic or scientific realities. But after the breaking up of the atom the science of logic has undergone a change, and it has been accepted that inferential argument too, in its nature, is as valid and reliable as direct argument. It has subsequently become possible for religious realities to be established on an academic level, i.e. exactly on the same level as material or non-religious theories.

2. In ancient times when man observed the world, it appeared to him that in nature there existed things which were very different from one another. This observation of appearance produced the mentality of idolatry. People began to think that in view of the great diversity of things in existence, their Creator too would perforce take many and varied shapes. But scientific study has shown that this variety is only that of appearance. Otherwise, all things in nature are different expressions of the same matter. In this way *shirk* (idolatry) came to be seen as an intellectually untenable practice, while monotheism gained the solid support of logic.

3. According to a statement of the Qur'an, the signs of God lay hidden in the earth and the heavens. The study of science has made it manifest to all men that the universe is a great storehouse of divine

arguments. "We will show them Our signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own souls, until they clearly see that this is the Truth." (41:53)

4. After the new discoveries of science, many such things have come to the knowledge of man as have rendered it possible to prove with new arguments those events which are of important religious significance. For instance, carbon 14 dating has made it possible to determine the exact age of the mummy of Rameses II, thereby providing scientific proof for the statement of the Qur'an that the body of Pharaoh was saved by God, so that it might become "a sign to all posterity." (10:92)

Islam in the Present Age

Now the question arises as to whether an Islam which teaches non-violence can be of relevance in the present age, and assume a superior position once again in new situations.

The answer is entirely in the positive. The truth is that Islam's being a peaceful religion shows that it is an eternal religion. Had it been a religion of violence, it would not have been eternal. For in modern times, the way of violence has been totally rejected by contemporary thinking. Now only that system is worthy of consideration and acceptance the teachings of which are based on peace and non-violence.

Modern thinking, for example, has rejected communism. One of the major reasons was that communism had to be sustained by violence. And under no circumstances is violence acceptable to the modern mind. Nazism and Fascism too have been rejected on similar grounds. Modern man, therefore, disapproves of religious and non-religious extremism, because they lead man, willy nilly, to violence.

But Islam is a religion of nature. It has held violence as inadmissible from the outset. Islam has been an upholder of peace, not violence, from day one.

In the past, Islam played a great role in the development of humanity, as a result of which human history entered a new age of progress and development. The time has come today for Islam to play a great constructive role, leading human history once again into a new age of progress.

What is called scientific or technical progress is the result of the discovery of some of the great secrets of nature. But if nature and its mysteries have always existed in our world, why has there been such a long delay in their discovery? Why could not the scientific advancement of the last few hundred years have been made thousands of year ago?

The reason was that in ancient times scientific enquiry was anathema to men of religion, to the point where religious persecution had become an inseparable obstacle to the progress of science. Since ancient times, religion and science (divine knowledge and human knowledge) were linked with one another. What Islam did was separate religion (which had become, in essence, a set of irrational beliefs) from scientific research and investigation. For instance, eclipses of the sun and moon had been linked with human destiny. The Prophet of Islam declared that eclipses had nothing to do with the lot of human beings. These were astronomical events, not events pertaining to the fate of mankind. (*Fathul Bari*, 2/611)

The incident of the pollination of dates is recorded in the books of hadith. The Prophet of Islam observed that in worldly matters such as these, "you should act according to your experience, as you know these matters better." (Sahih Muslim Bi Sharh An-Nawawi, 15/117)

This meant delinking religion and science from one another. In this way scientific research acquired an atmosphere of freedom for its functioning. For the first time in human history science (human knowledge) could be developed freely without the intervention of religion. And advancing gradually, culminated in the attainment of the modern age.

But, today man is again facing an even greater problem. That is, despite the extraordinary progress made in the field of science and technology, human beings are confronted with the problem of not knowing the limit of freedom.

Modern man aspired to freedom as the highest good, but once having reached this goal, he was unable to set reasonable limits to freedom. In consequence, unrestrained freedom descended into anarchy and lawlessness. This is the actual cause of many of the problems which are emerging in modern times in western society. Now man requires an ideology which delimits his freedom, drawing the line between desirable and undesirable freedom. And it is only Islam which can provide him with such an ideology.

Now is the time for this ideology to be presented to man, who is ready and waiting to accept it.

After the fall of communism (1991), much of the world was and still is, faced with an ideological vacuum. This vacuum can be filled by Islam alone. In the present world the developed countries have become economic or military superpowers, but the place is vacant for an ideological superpower, and that, potentially belongs to Islam.

There is only one obstacle in converting a great potential into a reality in favour of Islam. And that is the repeated recourse to violence by Muslim movements in modern times. Such action has presented Islam before the world in the guise of a violent religion. For this reason the man of today shies away from Islam. He fails to study Islam objectively. If this barrier could be removed and Islam once again brought before the world as a non-violent religion, or as a peaceful social system, then once again humanity would accept it, recognising it to be the voice of its own nature.

Modern man is in need of a new religion or a new system, based on peace. It should be free from superstitious beliefs, and should provide the answers to deep psychological questions, on our flawed existence. Its principles should not clash with scientific realities, and it should be supported by a victorious history.

Today no religion but Islam can lay such positive claims to acceptance, for it is Islam and Islam alone which fulfills all these conditions. Individually, there are many men and women today who, after having studied Islam, have acknowledged these unique qualities in Islam. Some have acknowledged them in theory while others have gone ahead and accepted Islam in practice.

Dawah Activism

Islamic activism in respect of its method is based on non-violence and in respect of its target is based on *dawah*. *Dawah*, in fact, is another name for a peaceful struggle for the propagation of Islam. It would be true to say that Islamic activism in fact is *dawah* activism.

The task of *dawah* is no simple one. It enjoys the status of a key factor. If this task is fully performed, all other objectives will be automatically achieved. Here are certain references from the Qur'an in this connection.

1. Through *dawah* the believers receive God's protection against the mischief of the opponents.
2. Through *dawah* even the direst of enemies turns into a dearest friend. (41:34)
3. *Dawah* proves Islam's ideological superiority. And without doubt nothing is greater than superiority of ideology. (10:32)
4. Through *dawah* a positive mentality is inculcated within the *ummah*. This is called 'honest counsel' in the Qur'an (7:68)
5. The mission of *dawah* is performed by human beings but the conducive conditions for it are provided by God. Just as the farming is to be done by the farmer while the rains come from God. In modern times favourable conditions have been fully provided to man. Now the believers' duty is to refrain from expending their energies in futile activities. They must exert their entire energy in *dawah* work. All the best results will ensue from this act.
6. The Prophet of Islam along with about two hundred of his companions left Mecca when the Meccan leaders had made it impossible for them to stay there. The Meccans had even decided to kill the Prophet. But the first speech the Prophet made on reaching Medina had no taste of bitterness, neither did it contain any mention of vengeance or violence against the Quraysh.

On reaching Medina first priority was given to the task of entering into peace treaties with the tribes in and around Medina, for instance with the Banu Khuza'a, etc. According to their pact neither would they fight against the Muslims nor would the Muslims fight against them. Most of the tribes in Arabia joined in these truce agreements.

But the Quraysh did not desist from aggression, and even engaged in certain military forays against the Muslims. But, finally, in the sixth year of Hijrah, the Prophet succeeded in making a peace treaty with the Quraysh as well at a place called Hudaibiya, albeit on acceptance of all the conditions laid down by the Quraysh.

Muslims Displaced

It is an incontrovertible fact that Muslims have not been able to join the mainstream in modern times. At all places and in every department they are leading their lives as if driven into a corner. This is

undoubtedly an extremely critical problem, for it has relegated Muslims to second class positions all over the world.

To me, the greatest reason for this is the violent attitude of the Muslims. Today's Muslims are easily provoked and become violent at anything which is against their way of thinking, or even not to their liking. It is true that not all Muslims become involved in acts of violence. Yet all Muslims would be regarded involved in this matter. This is because that section, of Muslims – in fact, the majority – who are not personally involved, neither disown those members of their community who are engaged in violence, nor even condemn them. In such a case, according to the Islamic shariah itself if the involved Muslims are directly responsible, the uninvolved Muslims are also indirectly responsible.

It is Muslims' religious and secular leaders who are actually responsible for this violent approach on the part of Muslims today. In modern times when Muslims have had to undergo the experience of defeat, almost all the religious, secular scholars (*ulama*) and intellectuals follow one single line, that of awakening the spirit of *jihad* (in the sense of *qital*) among Muslims. The entire Muslim world reverberates with such slogans as 'Jihad is our way and Jihad is the only solution to our problems!'

The entire world has witnessed a great number of large and small movements in violent response to the problems faced by Muslims.

If you go to Palestine, you will hear the youth singing a song no doubt taught to them by their elders:

*Let's make war, let's make war,
For war is the way to success.*

In modern times the violent approach of our ulema, intellectuals, and leaders of movements, is the sole reason for the present violent mentality among Muslims all over the world. It is as a result of this mentality that, if anyone writes a book against Islam, Muslims are prepared to kill the writer. If any procession raises anti-Muslim slogans, Muslims start stoning the procession instead of killing the evil by observing silence, which, as Umar Faruq advocated, would be the best strategy in this case. If there is any monetary or territorial controversy with any nation, they immediately take up arms against it, rather than adopt a peaceful strategy to solve the problem.

This violent mentality of Muslims is responsible for having alienated them from their neighbours everywhere. Their conduct clearly shows that they no longer cherish the ideal of universal brotherhood. Everywhere they are looked upon with aversion and dread. One can even see notices on walls which say 'Beware of Muslims', instead of 'Beware of dogs.' And if these words are not inscribed on walls, they are certainly inscribed on the hearts and minds of the people. The resulting dissociation has left Muslims a backward group in modern times. Even in advanced countries like America they remain backward as a community in comparison with other immigrant groups.

The only way to alleviate the tragic plight of Muslims is to bring them back to non-violent Islam, by helping to understand that their violent version of Islam is not the true one.

As soon as Muslims take to the path of non-violent Islam, they will be able to become equal partners with other communities. They will have joined the universal mainstream, and will consequently be able to

participate in all activities, in all institutions. People instead of dreading them, will welcome them. They will become a part of the universal brotherhood. Their issues will be looked upon with justice. Their equal partnership will be certain in all institutions ranging from the social to the educational.

Peaceful interaction will give Muslims the kind of intellectual stimulation and variety of experience which they must have if they are to tread the path of progress.

Interaction will also facilitate the task of *dawah* on a large scale. The natural result of this vast interaction of Muslims and non-Muslims will be that everywhere dialogue on Islam will be started, formally as well as informally. In modern times, because of the extremist and violent attitude of Muslims, serious dialogue between Islam and non-Islam has almost come to an end. Now when peaceful interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims takes place in a normal atmosphere, serious dialogue will ensue on its own. The beginning of serious dialogue between Islam and non-Islam is, without doubt, a very great success from the point of view of *dawah*.

The Qur'an describes Sulh Al-Hudaybiya, in the early period of Islam as a 'clear victory' It was a 'clear victory' in the sense that it established peace between the believers in *tawhid* and believers in *shirk*, thus making it possible for a serious dialogue to be held between the two on religious matters.

In modern times if Muslims abandon the path of violence and fully adopt the path of non-violence, this will be for Muslims like reviving the sunnah of Hudaybiya. And they will start receiving those great benefits which Islam and Muslims had gained after the event of Hudaybiya in the first phase.

Peace and Justice

One great problem for Muslims is that peace does not necessarily guarantee them justice. This has caused Muslims to become violent and to neglect opportunities for *dawah*. In modern times Muslims want a peace which brings them justice. But according to the law of nature, this kind of peace can never be achieved, that is why Muslims the world over are in a state of physical and mental unrest. Distressed in their minds, they have become violent in their thinking and in their actions.

The truth is that peace does not automatically produce justice. Peace in actual fact simply opens up opportunities for the achievement of justice. At the time of Hudaybiya the Prophet of Islam had not found justice. He had achieved peace but only by delinking it from justice. The Prophet had made this peace not to exact justice but to receive the opportunities. And great opportunities for *dawah* action did open up with the establishment of peace. The Prophet exploited these opportunities in full measure. Therefore, in just a few years' time the Prophet not only ensured justice, but set Islam upon a much more solid footing.

The Muslims of the present day have to understand this secret of nature. Only then will it be possible for them first to find peace, then ultimately their desired goal of justice.

Conclusion

In October 1997, I met a 36-year old European, Leon Zippo Hayes, who was born in the city of Christchurch in New Zealand. After having studied Islam, he has changed his religion. His Islamic name is Khalilur Rahman. Passing through Muslim countries he is going to perform Hajj by land.

During the conversation he said that in modern times Muslims are engaged in bloody war at many places, at some places with others and at other places among themselves. This had led him (like many others) to conclude that perhaps Islam was a religion of violence. Later, he studied the Qur'an with the help of translations, and when he reached this verse in the Qur'an: 'Whoever killed a human being should be looked upon as though he had killed all mankind (5:32),' he said that he was so moved that he could not believe that it was in the Qur'an.

This incident is broadly indicative of the thinking of non-Muslims on Islam. On seeing the actions of Muslims, people today find it hard to believe that Islam may be a religion of peace. But if Muslims stop engaging in violent activities and give people the opportunity to appreciate Islam in its original form, then certainly a great number of people would realise as they never had before that Islam was a peaceful religion and they would rush to it, saying that it was exactly the religion which their souls had, been seeking all along.

Trial

Man is free in this world. God has not placed any curbs on him. But this freedom is for the purpose of putting man to the test, and is not meant to encourage him to lead a life of permissiveness, like the animals and then just pass away one day. Rather its purpose is that man should lead a morally upright life *of his own free will*, thus demonstrating that he is of the highest moral character.

One who conducts himself in this matter should be reckoned as God's special servant who, without any apparent compulsion, chose to be a man of principle; who, without being subjected to any external force, did of his own free will, what his Lord would have desired. This liberty accorded to man gives him the opportunity to gain credit for being the most superior of all God's creatures.

All the things in this world are God's subjects. The stars and satellites rotate in space entirely at their Lord's bidding. Trees, rivers, mountains, and all other such natural phenomena are functioning according to the unchangeable ways of God laid down by Him in advance. Similarly, the animals follow exactly those instincts instilled in their species as a matter of Divine Will. Man is the only creature who has been given, exceptionally, the gift of power and freedom.

This freedom has opened doors of two kinds for man, one leading to success and the other to failure. If, on receiving freedom an individual becomes arrogant and insolent, it will mean that he has failed to pass the test.

But if on the other hand, he remains modest and humble, bowing to his Lord's will on all occasions, he will have made the right use of his God-given freedom: he will, without any compulsion, have bound himself by divine principles. One who chooses this course will succeed in the test of freedom. He will, be handsomely rewarded by God as no other creature. Held to be the chosen servant of God, he will remain in an everlasting state of blissfulness and blessedness.

Intentions

Islam attaches the utmost importance to intentions (*niyyah*). No action is acceptable to God purely on the basis of its outer appearance. He accepts only such actions as are performed with proper intention, and rejects those performed with ill-intention. Right intention is the moral purposiveness which underlies all actions performed solely for God's pleasure. One who acts on such feelings will be rewarded by God in the Hereafter.

Ill-intention, on the other hand, is a negative spur to worldly attainment. Ostensibly religious acts, if performed for worldly gain or public commendation, are in this sense ill-intentioned. Any fame, honour or popularity which ensues from an ill-intentioned act is a hollow triumph and is looked upon by the Almighty with extreme disfavour.

Intention is rooted in man's inner thinking and feelings. A common man is unable to penetrate the inner recesses of a person's mind but God knows full well what a man's thought processes and feelings are. People can be deluded by appearances, but God has complete knowledge of everything. He will deal with people according to His knowledge and will reward everyone exactly as he or she deserves.

Intention has to do with the inner reality. A thing which loses its reality or its meaningfulness is valueless. Similarly, an act which is performed with ill intention or with no good intention, has no value – neither in the eyes of man, nor of God.

Things are of value only when they are pure, without any adulteration. An act done with right intention is a pure act, and an act performed without right intention is an impure act.

Akhirat

Man is an eternal creature. However, his life-span has been divided by God into two parts. A very tiny part of it has been placed in this world, while all of the remainder has been placed in the Hereafter. The present world is the world of action, while the world of the Hereafter is the place for reaping the harvest of actions. The present world is imperfect, but the world of the Hereafter is perfect in every respect. The Hereafter is a limitless world where all things have been provided in their ideal state.

God has placed His heaven – full of all kinds of blessings – in that world of the Hereafter. Those who prove to be God-fearing and pious in this world will enter into that world to find the gates of heaven eternally open for them.

But those who are oblivious of God in this present world or who opt for the path of contumacy in regard to God's matters, are criminals in God's eyes. All such people will be deprived of the blessings of the Hereafter.

God is invisible in this present world, and will appear in all His power and majesty only in the world of the Hereafter. Then all human beings will bow low before Him. But at that time, surrendering will be of no avail. Self-abnegation and acceptance of God is desired only while God is still invisible. Surrendering before God after seeing Him in the Hereafter will not benefit anyone.

Death is not the end of a person's life. It is only the beginning of the next stage of life. Death is that interim stage when man leaves this temporary world of today for the eternal world of tomorrow. He goes out of the temporary accommodation of the world to enter the eternal resting place of the Hereafter. The coming of this stage in the Hereafter is the greatest certainty in one's life. No one can save himself from this fate in the Hereafter.

Angels

Of the many beings created by God, the angels are of special importance. They have been invested by God with the supernatural power to keep order in the functioning of the universe. They do not, however, deviate in the slightest from the path of God, for all their functioning is in complete obedience to His will.

Diverse and numerous events are taking place at every moment in the universe, for instance, the movement of the stars, the shining of the sun and moon, the falling of the rain, the alternation of the seasons, and so on. All of these, and many other continually recurring events are attended to by the angels. Working in the universe as extremely faithful and obedient servants of God, they ensure the continued existence of the human and animal species on earth.

As well as running the world's systems, these angels, a numerous band, take charge of all matters in heaven and hell.

The role of the angels can be understood by the example of a large factory. In any such factory, there are many big and complex machines which produce the goods for which the factory has been established. But these machines do not run on their own. To facilitate their smooth running many human hands are required. Therefore, in every factory there are always a number of people whose duty it is to attend constantly to their proper and efficient functioning. Similarly, countless angels are appointed to ensure the proper functioning of the great factory of the universe.

The difference between the two factories is only that in the material one, the human hands are visible, while in the metaphorical one – the great mechanism of the universe – the angels remain invisible to the naked eye.

Man may not be able to see the angels, but the angels can certainly see man, and keep a watch on him on behalf of God. It is these very angels who take man's soul away after death.

God

God is One, Eternal and Absolute. He is everything, everything is from Him. God, the Creator of all things is the Sustainer of the Universe.

Allah: there is no god but Him, the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. His is what the heavens and the earth contain. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows all about the affairs of men at present and in the future. They can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills. His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of both does not weary Him. He is the Exalted, the Immense One. (2:255)

Say: 'Allah is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him.' (112: 1-4)

Chapter 112 of the Qur'an, entitled *Ikhlas*, gives us the essence of monotheism. Not only does it tell us of the oneness of God, but it also makes it clear what the oneness of God means. This chapter presents the concept of God, purified of all human interpolation, for, prior to the advent of Islam, tampering with the sacred text had caused this concept of God to be distorted for all would-be believers. God is not many. He is only one. All depend upon him. He depends on none. He, in his own being, is all powerful. He is above to beget or begotten. He is such a unique being who has no equal or compeer. All kind of oneness belongs to this Almighty Being. The concept of One God is the actual beginning point and also the only source of Islamic teachings.

Prophet

A prophet is a person chosen by God as His representative. When God appoints someone as His Messenger, He sends His angel to him to inform him of his new status. In that way, the individual can have no doubts about his appointment as God's apostle. Later, God reveals His message to him through His angels, so that he may communicate the divine teachings to all his fellow men.

God has given man a mind so that he may be endowed with understanding. But this mind can only grasp things that are apparent. It cannot go below the surface, and there are many things to be apprehended, for which a superficial knowledge is insufficient. The deeper realities of this world are beyond the scope of the human mind, and so far as God and the next world are concerned, they must remain forever invisible – beyond the reach of human perception.

What the prophet does is to enlighten people so that they may overcome this human inadequacy. He tells of the reality of things here and how, and also gives tidings of the next world. He thereby enables the individual to formulate a plan for his entire existence in the full light of knowledge and awareness so that he may carve out a successful life for himself.

Since the settlement of human beings on earth, the prophets have been coming one after another. In every age they have been the conveyors of God's messages to human beings. However, whatever records of these ancient prophets have survived have been rendered historically unreliable by interpolations. The same is true of the books they brought to mankind. The sole exception was the case of the Prophet Muhammad, who had been chosen by God as His Final Messenger. The Prophet was born in an age when the history of the world was already being extensively chronicled. This in itself made circumstances conducive to authentic records being kept of God's messages and the Prophet's exemplary life. The relevant facts were passed on from one generation to the next by both oral and written tradition, and with the advent of the printing press came the modern guarantee that no changes would ever be made in the divine scriptures. This renders unassailable the position of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) as God's Final Messenger and His sole representative on earth till Domsday.

The Qur'an

The Qur'an, the Book of God, enshrines the teachings which were basically the same as were to be found in previous revealed scriptures. But these ancient scriptures are no longer preserved in their original state. Later additions and deletions have rendered them unreliable, whereas the Qur'an, preserved in its original state, is totally reliable.

The Qur'an has 114 chapters. Its contents in a nutshell are: belief in one God, and considering oneself answerable to Him; firm belief that the guidance sent by God through the Prophet Muhammad is the truth and that man's eternal salvation rests thereon.

The position of the Qur'an is not just that it is one of the many revealed scriptures but that it is the only authentic heavenly book, as all other books, due to human additions and deletions, have been rendered historically unreliable. When a believer in the previous revealed scripture turns to the Qur'an, it does not mean that he is rejecting his own belief, but rather amounts to his having re-discovered his own faith in an authentic form.

The Qur'an is a sacred book sent by the Lord of all creation. It is a book for all human beings, because it has been sent by that Divine Being who is the God of all of us.

The Qur'an is no new heavenly scripture. It is only an authentic edition of the previous heavenly scriptures. In this respect, the Qur'an is a book for all human beings, of all nations. It is the expression of God's mercy for one and for all. It is a complete message sent by God for every one of us. The Qur'an is a light of guidance for all the world just as the sun is the source of light and heat for all the world.

Islam means submission. The religion of Islam is so named because it is based on obedience to God. A true believer in Islam is one who subordinates his thinking to God, who follows God's dictates in all aspects of his life.

Islam is the religion of the entire universe. For the entire universe and all its parts are functioning in accordance with the law laid down by God.

Such behaviour is also desired of man. Man should also lead his life as God's obedient servant just as the rest of the universe is fully subservient to God. The only difference is that the universe has submitted to God compulsorily, while man is required to submit to the will of God by his own choice.

When man adopts Islam, first of all it is his thinking which comes under Islam, then his desires, his feelings, his interests, his relations, his loves and his hatred. All are coloured by his obedience to God's will.

When man, in his daily life comes under God's command, his behaviour with people, his dealings all are molded by the demands of Islam. From inside to outside he becomes a person devoted to God.

Man is God's servant, and indeed, the only proper way for man in this world is to live as the servant of God. Islam, in fact, is another name for this life of servitude to God. Where the Islamic life is devoted to the service of God, the un-Islamic life unashamedly flouts the will of God. Islam teaches man to lead an obedient life and surrender himself completely to the will of God. It is people who do so who will share God's blessings in the next world.